

Jersey 1204 - The Forging of an Island Community

By J.A. Everard and J.C. Holt, both of Cambridge University

A book review by Jamie Poindexter

This book is a must-read for any genealogist interested in historical events affecting our ancestors daily lives. Our family name does not appear in this book, however the authors give us a look at Jersey politics and possible clues on how we came to be in Jersey.

Judith Everard and Sir James Holt identify the events leading up to the loss of the Duchy of Normandy in 1204 by King John to his cousin, Phillip Augustus, King of France. They also explain why the Channel Islands were important to John's Plantagenet empire after the loss of Normandy. The next fifty years are also explored as religion and the feudal system influenced royal administration of Jersey and its development into the foundation of Jersey's government today.

As part of the Duchy, the islanders spoke Norman French and many had family or property ties to Normandy, yet the island remained loyal to John. How did the Crown keep Jersey's loyalty? Why were the Channel Islands so strategically important to John?

After Normandy was lost to France, those with property in both Normandy and Jersey had to choose to whom to remain loyal, John or Phillip. If they chose John, they lost their lands in Normandy. If they chose Phillip, they lost lands in Jersey. Some kept both in the family by dividing the lands between two siblings, thus dividing the family into two branches.

The authors look at the changes in both the Royal governance of Jersey as well as the religious governance of the island. The defense of the island became a challenge with mainland Normandy visible from Jersey's eastern shores. The King's Castle at Mont Orgueil was built to protect the island, as Phillip Augustus had captured the island more than once.

Commissioned by the Jersey Heritage Trust and the States of Jersey to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Jersey's unique relationship with the Crown, this hard cover book is available for £19.95 from the Société Jersiaise by going to the PDA web site at www.poindexterfamily.org/history/publications.html or write Société at 7 Pier Road, St Helier, Jersey JE2 4XW, Great Britain. If sending a check, make sure it is for British pounds, not dollars.

Note: I was very fortunate to schedule a vacation to Jersey when this book was released in May 2004. Sir James Holt presented their research to an almost packed auditorium in St. Helier, Jersey. It was a great experience for me to hear his lecture. The Bailiff of Jersey was present, along with other Island VIPs, members of the Société, Jersey Heritage Trust and the States of Jersey. After the lecture I was given the honor of meeting Sir James and to have him sign my copies of the book.